[0051] In accordance with the embodiment in **Figure 3**, the auctioneer computer **45** may command the bid interpreters **14** to act as part of a voice conferencing system by sending data packets through connections **24** to the bid interpreters **14**. With the voice conferencing system thus enabled, bidders participating in the auction can hear the voices of active bidders in addition to the voice of the auctioneer. Active bidders are herein defined as bidders participating in the auction and entering bidder messages representing valid bids through their telephone sets **10**. Inactive bidders are bidders participating in the auction that remain silent on the line; bidders involved in a different auction process than a bidding process, such as in the process of obtaining authorization; or bidders who make comments that do not pertain to the auction. The distinction among active and inactive bidders is made at the level of bid interpreters **14**, which use voice recognition or other suitable decoding algorithms, to recognize the content of the messages received from bidders.

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel Claims 1-23, without prejudice or disclaimer of the subject matter claimed therein.

Please add new Claims 24-49 ,as follows:

24. An auction system for use over a communication network, comprising:

an auctioneer voice transmitter for entering auctioneer voice messages from an auctioneer;

a plurality of bidder voice terminals each for entering voice bidder messages from a bidder respective thereto, each of said bidder voice terminals also for presenting voice bidder messages from other bidders and said auctioneer voice messages;

a connecting means interconnecting said transmitter and said terminals;

a processing means attached to said connecting means for converting said auctioneer voice messages and said voice bidder messages into a bidder data signal; and

an output means connected to said processing means for presenting said bidder data signals to said auctioneer.

25. The auction system according to claim 24, wherein said processing means further comprises a message selector for determining whether said voice bidder messages are active bidder messages or inactive bidder messages such that only said active bidder messages are presented at said output device.

26. The auction system according to claim 25, wherein said bidder voice terminals are attached, via said connection

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means, to said message selector such that only said active bidder messages are presented at said bidder voice terminals.

27. The auction system according to claim 26, wherein said inactive bidder messages are returned to an originating bidder voice terminal each accompanied by a message that said each bidder message was determined to be inactive.

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28. The auction system according to claim 25, wherein said inactive bidder messages are returned to an originating bidder voice terminal each accompanied by a message that said each bidder message was determined to be inactive.

29. The auction system according to claim 24, further including a time compensation means, attached to said connection means, for determining propagation delays of signals within said network and utilizing said propagation delays for ordering said bidder messages at said output means according to a real-time order in to which of said bidder messages was placed.

30. The auction system according to claim 29, wherein said time compensation means further utilizes said propagation delays for alerting said auctioneer that one or more of said

bidders entered one of said bidder messages before hearing that bidding was closed.

31. The auction system according to claim 30, wherein said propagation delay estimates are obtained by estimating the delay before receiving an echo from each bidder voice terminal.

32. The auction system according to claim 29, wherein said propagation delay estimates are obtained by estimating the delay before receiving an echo from each bidder voice terminal.

33. The auction system according to claim 24, further comprising a means for reducing background noise.

34. An auction system for use over a communication network, comprising:

an auctioneer voice transmitter for entering auctioneer voice messages from an auctioneer;

a plurality of bidder voice terminals each for entering voice bidder messages from a bidder respective thereto, each of said bidder voice terminals also for presenting voice bidder messages from other bidders and said auctioneer voice messages;

a connecting means interconnecting said transmitter and said terminals;

a processing means attached to said connecting means for converting said voice bidder messages into a bidder data signal, said processing means including a message selector for determining whether said voice bidder messages are active bidder messages or inactive bidder messages;

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a time compensation means attached to said connecting means for determining propagation delays of signals within said network and utilizing said propagation delays for ordering said active bidder messages according to a real-time order in which said bidder messages were entered; and

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an output means connected to said processing means and said time compensation means for presenting, in order, said active bidder data signals to said auctioneer.

35. The auction system according to claim 34, wherein said bidder voice terminals are attached, via said connection means, to said message selector such that only said active bidder messages are presented at said bidder voice terminals.

36. The auction system according to claim 34, wherein said time compensation means further utilizes said propagation delays for alerting said auctioneer that one or more of said bidders entered one of said bidder messages before hearing that bidding was closed.

37. The auction system according to claim 36, wherein said propagation delay estimates are obtained by estimating the delay before receiving an echo from each bidder voice terminal.

38. The auction system according to claim 35, wherein said propagation delay estimates are obtained by estimating the delay before receiving an echo from each bidder voice terminal.

39. The auction system according to claim 34, further comprising a means for reducing background noise.

40. The auction system according to claim 34, wherein said inactive bidder messages are returned to an originating bidder voice terminal accompanied by a message that said bidder message was determined to be inactive.

41. A processing means for use in an auction system for use over a communication network, said auction system having an auctioneer voice transmitter for entering auctioneer voice messages from an auctioneer; a plurality of bidder voice terminals each for entering voice bidder messages from a bidder respective thereto, each of said bidder voice terminals also for presenting voice bidder messages from other bidders and said auctioneer voice messages; a connecting means interconnecting said transmitter and said terminals, said processing means comprising:

recognizing meansfor converting said and voice bidder messages into a bidder data signal; and

a message selector for determining whether said voice bidder messages are active bidder messages or inactive bidder messages such that only said active bidder messages are presented at an output means.

42. The processing means according to claim 41, wherein said bidder voice terminals are attached to said message selector such that only said active bidder messages are presented at said bidder voice terminals.

43. The processing means according to claim 42, wherein said inactive bidder messages are returned to an originating bidder voice terminal accompanied by a message that said bidder message was determined to be inactive.

Sub B7 44. A method of conducting an auction over a network comprising the steps of:

receiving, from an auctioneer, an auctioneer voice message at an auctioneer voice terminal connected to said network;

presenting said auctioneer voice message at a plurality of bidder voice terminal connected to said network;

receiving a voice bidder message from a bidder, said bidder voice message being responsive to said auctioneer voice message, said voice bidder message received at one of said bidder voice terminals respective to said bidder;

presenting said received voice bidder message at a remainder of said bidder voice terminals;

converting said voice bidder message into a bidder data signal;

presenting said bidder data signal to said auctioneer at an output means; and

repeating the foregoing steps until said auctioneer closes bidding.

45. The method according to claim 44, further comprising the step of determining whether said voice bidder message is active or inactive and only presenting said bidder data signal at said output means if said voice bidder message was active.

46. The method according to claim 45, further comprising the step of only presenting said voice bidder message at said remainder of said bidder voice terminals if said voice bidder message was active.

47. The method according to claim 19 further comprising the step of returning said voice bidder message to an originating bidder voice terminal if said voice bidder message was inactive.

48. The method according to claim 47, further comprising the step of sending a notification to said originating bidder voice terminal that said voice bidder message was inactive.

49. The method according to claim 44 further comprising the steps of: